

SYSTEM PRICE FROM £750

BOSTON ACOUSTICS A-26
£250 ★★★★★

MARANTZ MELODY MEDIA (M-CR603)
£500 ★★★★★

Invest in the M-CR603 in 2011 and you'll get the AirPlay upgrade free of charge



APPLE iPhone
EVARIES
★★★★★

• THE MICRO HI-FI SOLUTION •

We've covered **AirPlay** in some depth with the Zeppelin Air review, and in terms of operation the feature works identically on this Marantz micro.

It does, however, sound much better. In conjunction with the Boston A-26 speakers, the M-CR603 chucks out tunes with serious weight and scale. It sounds like a much bigger system than it is, and will comfortably fill all but the largest room.

Scale isn't the only strength here: as a system, this is smooth, fluid and punchy. Bass is deep and controlled, treble is clean and well-defined, and there's lovely vocal focus within the wide, spacious soundstage. Essentially it's a grown-up sound with all-round quality.

A fine all-round set-up

'All-round' is a term that can also be applied to the Marantz's feature set. On top of the aforementioned (and very 'now') AirPlay support, it can also play CDs, form a wired digital connection with an Apple device and access DAB, FM and AM radio. What's more, and more important to this specific test, it also offers a variety of streaming options, from internet radio, Napster, Last.fm, and network streaming.

So, if you're the kind of person who wants on-demand access to almost all of the music in the world (15 million tracks if you want to be a bit more specific) and aren't too worried about sound quality, a £5-per-month Napster subscription will

cover it. What's more, it sounds much better than the relatively low bitrates might suggest, thanks in no small part to the smoothness of that splendid Marantz/Boston partnership.

If you're more the type to rank sound quality above all else, this Marantz micro will also play the CDs you've meticulously ripped into lossless FLAC or uncompressed WAV formats (as well as the MP3s, AACs and WMAs that also typically have a home in the average music library).

It will even go as far as playing 24-bit/96kHz high-resolution FLACs. While the system won't reveal the extra detail on offer to quite the same degree as the higher-end systems here, you will still hear dynamic and detail improvements if you make the effort to search out the best HD tracks.

If all of that takes your fancy, it would be in your best interests to move fast: buy the M-CR603 before the end of the year and you can get the AirPlay upgrade, which usually costs £39, free of charge. You can't argue too much with that.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Streams locally, from the internet, and plays physical discs; great looks; big, authoritative, punchy sound

AGAINST No wi-fi

VERDICT Few products fit the all-in-one tag better than this Marantz, and it sounds great, too

NOW ADD THIS



Marantz Wizz App
£free

If you're using AirPlay, your iOS device is already your remote control, but when you want to switch to CD or network streaming, the Wizz App will keep you in control. It's far from a perfect controller solution – having to browse your music a page at a time rather than simply scrolling is a bit slow, and will feel very unintuitive to iOS device users – but once you get used to its foibles and limitations, the Wizz App proves to be a pretty useful free add-on to the user experience.